

MID-ULSTER MATTERS

Spring 2009 Newsletter

Hello and welcome to the Spring 2009 edition of Mid-Ulster Matters. This edition coincides with the Official Opening of my new UUP Office in Moneymore. In this and future issues I hope to keep you informed as to what is happening at Stormont and touch on issues which may be of interest to the people of Mid-Ulster.



RECENT REPUBLICAN MURDERS

At the outset I would like to express my sincere condolences to the family of Constable Stephen Carroll who was murdered in Craigavon and the two soldiers, Mark Quinsey and Patrick Azimkar murdered at Massareene Barracks, and to wish a full and speedy recovery to the soldiers and civilians injured in the Antrim attack.

What has happened in the last week will have sent a shiver of fear through many families and brought back awful memories of the dark days of the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s.

We must not slip back into the bad old days when incidents such as these were an almost daily occurrence and become accepted as the norm. Society must make a choice here and now, and anybody with a scrap of information must come forward and pass that information on to the Police.

Politicians must play their part in giving leadership to the community, and in giving total and unequivocal support to the Police and the Army. The Chief Constable must be given whatever resources he requires - financial or physical, including access to Special Forces and military support – to combat this threat.

The terrorists who have carried out these attacks are the enemies of all those who wish to see a peaceful Northern Ireland. They have nothing to offer anyone – Unionist or Nationalist – but blood, tears and misery. It must not be forgotten that these are the same people who brought us the Omagh massacre.

As if the murder of more innocent people was not enough, in the midst of a worldwide recession they are trying to destroy the fragile economy here and their actions will do nothing to attract the outside investment that we so desperately need.

I would appeal to those in the nationalist community to give these people no hiding place and no succour. They are as much the enemies of nationalists as they are the enemies of unionists. They are trying to return us to the nightmare we took nearly thirty years to end.

I would also appeal to those in the unionist community to remain calm and not to get drawn into this. Let me be absolutely clear when I say that there must be no retaliation, and nothing should be done to create more work or distraction for the Police and the Army. Let the actions of the Real IRA speak for themselves and let them stand condemned in the eyes of the world. We must obey the law and support the legitimate forces of law and order. The security forces are the only people who are equipped to deal with this situation and they must be given our support and a free hand.

THIS TERM AT STORMONT

The so-called “Folks on the Hill” have a wide range of issues to tackle, including the rising unemployment, the Devolution of Policing & Justice, ongoing uncertainty regarding the Transfer Test, Fuel Poverty, the Housing crisis, PPS 21 re Planning in the rural area, the Presbyterian Mutual Society and the ongoing situation affecting the Agricultural sector.

ULSTER UNIONIST LINK WITH THE CONSERVATIVES



On Thursday the 5th of March the Ulster Unionist Party Executive met to confirm the electoral pact with the Conservative Party. This link-up gives us the prospect of allowing the electorate of Northern Ireland to vote for candidates who will enable us to become more fully and demonstrably an equal partner within the UK family. For too long Northern Ireland and its politics have been viewed as a place apart by the British mainstream.

The UUP believes that the Union is a two-way process and we believe that (a pan-UK unionist vehicle) this link is the best way of promoting the values of the Union.

The pact will operate during the next European and Westminster Elections, but the two parties will remain independent of each other and it is not a merger. The full title is Ulster Conservatives & Unionists – New Force.

Our partnership is at least with the Conservative Party, placing us at the heart of British politics with a shared commitment to the Union. This has attracted some criticism from the DUP which is bizarre to say the least bearing in mind their partnership is with Sinn Fein and the Republican Movement who spent thirty years trying to destroy that Union.

The first test will come on Thursday 4th June in the shape of the European Election. I am delighted that our candidate Jim Nicholson MEP was able to join me to help formally open my new Moneymore office.

The Ulster Unionist Party has the interest of Northern Ireland and Unionism at heart and Jim remaining in his seat at the European Parliament will ensure that our popular Unionist MEP continues to work and fight for the people of this Province for the foreseeable future.



WIDER POLITICS

Although Northern Ireland is in a better place now politically than was the case in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, there are still many problems which face the people of Northern Ireland, and which are the duty of politicians to resolve.

These include;

- The ongoing threat from so-called dissident republicans who have not accepted that the IRA's campaign ended in defeat. As a former member of the RUC Reserve who served in the dark days of the 1970s and 1980s, I am all too aware of the task facing the PSNI and Security Services as they seek to combat those whose only aim is to destroy not to build.
- There are also those who would seek to create and exploit community tensions by attacking Halls and buildings such as Orange Halls, GAA Halls, or places of Worship of whatever denomination. I have consistently condemned such attacks and the people who carry them out. They have no cause but themselves, and have nothing to offer anyone.
- A regrettable and unwelcome feature of recent years has been the emergence of criminal gangs, particularly those linked to the drug trade.

As I have said before, the Police must be given all necessary resources to catch these people and put them behind bars where they cannot inflict damage on the rest of society. We did not come through the nightmare of the Troubles and the scourge of paramilitary terrorist violence and mayhem, to see it replaced by a new post-ceasefire generation of criminals and thugs who are out to make life a misery for decent law-abiding people and communities.

CONSTITUENCY MATTERS

- In the last few months I have continued to host visits to Stormont from a wide range of local community and school groups and individuals. It is always a pleasure to see the people of Mid-Ulster visit their Parliament Buildings and learn a little of the history of Stormont and see what goes on in the present day.

Groups have included Voluntary Groups, Church Groups, Young Farmers Clubs and of course School parties. Last month it was a particular privilege to welcome pupils from my old school, Stewartstown Primary as they visited Stormont. Any group wishing to arrange a visit to Stormont should contact my Office.



- I have participated in numerous debates on matters of National politics, but I have also devoted a great deal of time and effort on local issues, principally the flawed decision to close Maghera High School, the need for urgent and widespread upgrading of roads in Mid-Ulster and the west of the Province generally and the concerns centering around the Mid-Ulster Hospital in Magherafelt.

- I continue to work with various community groups from Mid-Ulster in assisting them gain funding for projects and local initiatives. My most recent success story has been the Indian Community receiving funding from OFMDFM for two staff to manage local community projects.

- The recent thefts of cattle occurring throughout the Province are of concern to me and I would urge all farmers in Mid-Ulster to be extra vigilant in the coming months. Take care to step-up the security surrounding your animals, ensuring your cattle sheds are locked each night bearing in mind the cost of just one stolen beast could be in excess of £1,000.

Keep up-to-date on my latest events and press statements by logging on to my website at www.billyarmstrong.co.uk or follow me daily as 'unionistbilly' on the popular twitter.com website



IMPORTANT DATES FOR THE DIARY

THURSDAY 4th JUNE – EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

FRIDAY 3rd JULY – ANNUAL UUP BBQ AT PROSPECT HOUSE

ACCESS 2 BENEFITS TRAINING



My constituency office staff in Stewartstown and Moneymore recently underwent a certified training program with the Access2Benefits team. A2B is a free, simple and anonymous online system which provides Over 60's with the opportunity to evaluate the benefits to which they are entitled to. For further information call in with my staff in Stewartstown or Moneymore and they will be able to take you through the online process. Alternatively you can go to www.a2b.org.uk for further information.

REGISTER TO VOTE



With the European Elections fast approaching it is important that constituents in Mid-Ulster take the time to ensure they are registered to vote. Have you recently changed address? Are you born in 1991 or earlier and have not already registered? Register online at aboutmyvote.co.uk or alternatively electoral registration forms can be picked up from my Stewartstown and Moneymore offices.

MONEYMORE OFFICE

Friday 6th March saw the opening of a new Constituency Office in Moneymore. The full-time office at 20 High Street, Moneymore is open daily from 9.30 am until 5.30 pm and is in addition to my existing office at Prospect House, Stewartstown, which will continue to be available throughout the day as well as outside normal office hours for consultation.



I am delighted to be able to further improve and enhance services to the people of Mid-Ulster by opening an additional office in Moneymore, and I extend a warm welcome to any constituents who may want to call in and raise important local issues with me.

It is very important that the people of Mid-Ulster receive effective local practical support from their Ulster Unionist representatives and I feel that this office will provide me with an excellent additional facility to reach out to all of you.

THE MID-ULSTER TEAM WORKING FOR YOU



Billy Armstrong
Mid-Ulster Ulster
Unionist MLA



Sandra Overend
Office Manager and
UUP Women's
Development Officer



Stephen Barr
Research and Political
Advisor



Mark Hill
Constituency
Research Assistant

Stormont Office
Room 308
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
Belfast BT4 3XX
(028)90 520305

Stewartstown Office
Prospect House
Coagh Road
Stewartstown
Dungannon BT71 5JH
(028)87 738641

Moneymore Office
20 High Street
Moneymore
Magherafelt
BT45 7PD
(028) 86 748090